

Eastern Europe

GALINA YEMELIANOVA

Although Russia is widely associated with Orthodox Christianity, it accommodates almost 15 million Muslims in its federally organized state. The major Islamic enclaves of the Russian Federation are situated in the Volga-Urals and the North Caucasus. Following the fall of Communism Russia's Islamic regions have experienced a revival of Islam, enhanced by ideological voids, centrifugal political processes and the shifting sands of civil society. The autonomous republics of Tatarstan in the Volga-Urals and Dagestan in the North Caucasus exemplify two distinctive models of a relationship between Islam and power in the post-Communist *umma*. The following draws on the findings of a three-year research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) entitled 'Islam, Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Soviet Tatarstan and Dagestan'.

In post-Soviet Tatarstan Islam has become an organic part of the Tatar national revival. Historically the ancestors of the modern Tatars were Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi rite. The Tatars' four-and-a-half centuries of existence within the Russian Orthodox political and cultural environment has rendered 'Tatar' and 'Islam' practically synonymous. The Islamic renaissance among Tatars has been hampered by high levels of urbanization and secularization, and the bi-national nature of Tatarstan's society. These circumstances are responsible for the idea, among dissident Tatar nationalists, of re-integrating Islam into the fabric of Tatar society, represented by the Vsetatarskii Obshestvenni Tsentr (VTOTS, All-Tatar Public Centre), the party of Ittifaq (Union), Milli Mejlis (National Assembly) and Azatlyk (Freedom). After the abortive anti-Gorbachev *coup d'état* in August 1991, the Tatar nationalists received *carte blanche* from Tatarstan President Shaimiev, who manipulated them in order to avoid inevitable repercussions from Moscow due to his backing of the anti-Yeltsin camp.

During the period of amicable relations between the official Tatar establishment and the Tatar nationalists, lasting from 1989 till 1994, the government in Kazan (capital of Tatarstan) responded favourably to the nationalists' main Islam-related aspirations. In particular, it encouraged the emergence of a separate Islamic administration – Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Respubliki Tatarstan (DUMRT, Islamic Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan), which declared its independence from the all-Russian federal Islamic administration, the Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Evropeiskoi Rossii i Sibiri (DUMES, Islamic Spiritual Board of the European Part of Russia and Siberia), based in Ufa.

The 1994 power-sharing treaty between Moscow and Kazan, which secured wider autonomy for the Tatarstan leadership, put an end to the alliance between the establishment and the Tatar nationalists. Shaimiev's team opted for the formation of a democratically camouflaged, moderate ethnocratic regime which necessitated the neutralization of the Tatar national opposition. This included the co-optation of the nationalists' most intelligent representatives, the formation of the official duplicate national organizations and the incorporation of some nationalist ideas into the official ideology. For example, in opposition to the Milli Mejlis the Shaimiev government sponsored the formation of a tame Vsetatarskii Mezhdunarodnii Congress (All-Tatar World Congress) under the leadership of Indus Tagirov. It also appropriated nationalist policies in areas such as language, education, and especially religion (e.g. restoration and building of mosques, opening an Islamic University, Islamic colleges and madrasas).

# Islam and Power in Post-Communist Islamic Russia

In spite of the official separation between the state and religion, as declared by the 1992 Constitution, the Shaimiev government supported de facto an increasing role for Islam in Tatar politics. It perceived the DUMRT as an indispensable attribute of Tatarstan's sovereignty and national distinctiveness. In February 1998 Tatarstan officials orchestrated the unifying congress of Tatarstan Muslims and promoted Gusman Iskhakov as the mufti of Tatarstan. Since then the government has discreetly supported Mufti Iskhakov's policy aimed at making Kazan the Islamic capital of Eurasia and centralizing Tatarstan's Islamic communities under the DUMRT's auspices in opposition to the Ufa Mufti Talgat Tadjuddinov. In July 1999 the authorities adopted a new law on 'The Freedom of Consciousness and Religious Formations', recognizing the DUMRT as the only legitimate Islamic administration in the republic. The formal display of loyalty has allowed Mufti Iskhakov to enhance his personal power and to place his relatives and associates in the major local Islamic administrations of Tatarstan. He also introduced new registration rules for Islamic communities which rendered the status of Mufti Talgat Tadjuddinov's followers illegal.

In addition to forging special relations with the *muftiyat*, Tatarstan authorities have promoted Islamic themes in official symbols, architecture, monuments and design. The strengthening of the symbolic function of Islam has been accompanied by some attempts to revive its ideological function. To this end the leading Tatar official ideologist, R. Khakimov, has advocated the restoration of Tatar reformist Islam or Jadidism as a viable basis for the Tatar national ideas. He introduced the concept of EuroIslam, described as a neo-Jadidism, which would arguably permit the resolution of the apparently inevitable conflict between formally Muslim Tatarstan and allegedly Islamophobic Europe.

On the whole, however, the impact of Islam on Tatarstan's official politics has been more symbolic than genuine. Islam has been regarded as a vital component of Tatarness while Tatarstan society has remained overwhelmingly secular. As for the religious Islamic revival, it has been weak and has had only a marginal impact on political and public life.

## Dagestan

In Dagestan the influence of Islam in the policy-making process has been much more prominent than in Tatarstan, due in part to the substantially higher level of religiosity of the population. Another reason is the much deeper economic crisis, aggravated by Dagestan's close proximity to war-stricken and intensively Islamicized Chechnya. Dagestani society has relatively strong communal, ethno-clan and religious ties which supersede individual rights and values. Most Dagestanis are Sunnis of the Shafii rite, although the Nogays of northern Dagestan adhere to the Hanafi rite. It is also significant that the majority of Dagestani Muslims profess mystical Islam – Sufism of Naqshbandi, Shadhili, Dzhazuli, Kadiri, and Yasawi orders.

Local Sufism absorbed various pre-Islamic beliefs and practices and became deeply integrated into the traditional community system. As a result, there emerged a particular regional form of Sufism, known as Tariqatism.

Compared to Tatarstan, in Dagestan Islam has remained a pivotal social and cultural regulator. Its survival, although mainly in its popular Sufi form, is due to Dagestan's significantly lower scale of industrialization, urbanization and resulting secularization, and the overwhelming numerical superiority of Muslims over non-Muslims. During the Soviet period the traditional community and clan-based Dagestani society absorbed Soviet collectivism and Party centralism and approximated the Islamic Communist model advocated by Sultan-Galiev and other Islamic Communists of the 1920s. Consequently, the bulk of Dagestanis were devastated by the break-up of the USSR and subsequent de-Sovietization of Dagestan. Nonetheless, the Soviet political system persisted in Dagestan until 1995 and the Communists maintained their popularity until the late 1990s, much longer than anywhere else in Russia.

The breakdown of the Soviet economic and industrial complex and the drop in federal subsidies brought about extreme hardships to Dagestanis, aggravated by the war in neighbouring Chechnya. Among its worst consequences have been the mass impoverishment and desolation, the spread of military and terrorist activity on Dagestani territory and the proliferation of a culture of violence and lawlessness. These factors have created a fertile breeding ground for extremism, both religious and political. Like Chechnya, Dagestan has been overwhelmed by a wave of terrorism, including political assassinations and kidnappings in return for ransoms.

The failure of ethno-nationalists to generate a viable opposition to the corrupt and ineffective Dagestani government encouraged popular Islamic protest. This was channelled largely into the Islamic fundamentalist movement, known as Salafism, or Wahhabism. By 1999 about 7 to 9% of Dagestani Muslims had succumbed to the increasingly popular Wahhabism. On several occasions during the 1990s Wahhabi leaders demonstrated their ability to mobilize their followers for the struggle against the injustice and lawlessness associated with the ruling regime. In response, the Dagestani authorities opted for ruthless political and administrative suppression of Wahhabism altogether.

The common anti-Wahhabi stance had brought together the Dagestani government and the Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Dagestana (DUMD, Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan), controlled by the Avar ethnic party, and in particular, by the Naqshbandi *wird* (*tariqa* branch) of Shaykh Sayid-Efendi Aytseev (Chirkeevskii). In 1997, as a result of pressure from the latter, the authorities institutionalized Tariqatism as the only legitimate and traditional form of Islam in Dagestan, banning Wahhabism. Many Wahhabi leaders were arrested, their

offices demolished and periodicals closed. The Dagestan pro-government mass media has launched an anti-Wahhabi propaganda campaign, presenting Wahhabis exclusively as foreign, mainly Saudi and British mercenaries, despite the fact that many are indigenous Dagestanis. Furthermore, the term Wahhabi has been applied to any representative of the opposition, irrespective of his or her religious orientation.

This resolute anti-Wahhabi position of the official authorities of Dagestan has also been enhanced by the Chechen and Moscow factors. The Dagestani authorities feared that the proliferation of Wahhabism in Dagestan would facilitate the Chechen radicals' plan to unite Chechnya and Dagestan into a single Islamic state, ruled by Wahhabi Chechens. On the other hand, under the conditions of protracted military conflict between Moscow and Chechnya, Dagestan's official denunciation of Wahhabism has provided important leverage for the continuing inflow of federal subsidies to Makhachkala. For example, as a reward for their unambiguous support for Moscow during the abortive Chechen-Wahhabi invasion of Dagestan in August and September 1999, federal financial support for the republic has increased by 270%. Since then the leaders of Dagestan have carefully attuned their rhetoric and actions to the policies of President Putin, who tends to equate Wahhabism with Islamic extremism and international terrorism.

The ongoing official physical and ideological warfare against Wahhabism has secured for Sufism the position of official traditional Islam. However, given the deep interweaving of Sufism with primordial social networks based on clan solidarity, it is unlikely that it could provide a plausible ideological framework for the future modernization and democratization of Dagestani society. Moreover, the prolongation of the current economic and social disorder, on the one hand, and the association of Sufism with a semi-criminal and inefficient regime, on the other, might continue to generate increasing receptiveness to Salafi Islam, which could come to be regarded as the last resort for socially and economically alienated members of the ex-Soviet Dagestani *umma*.

*Galina Yemelianova is a research fellow at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies and the Theology Department at the University of Birmingham, UK.  
E-mail: g.yemelianova@bham.ac.uk*